



Scott "Last-Minute" Olmsted

EXPERTS AT WORK

The plan was to let the expert caller work his magic. All I had to do was work Winchester's new stuff—XTended Range Hi-Density—into a bird. The problem was we were so far from the birds I was sure they couldn't hear Alex's calls.

I'd hunted with Alex Rutledge before. He's a pro staffer with Hunter's Specialties who's called and killed more birds than me, but by 7 a.m. I was convinced he was delusional.

Yelp, yelp, yelp, went Alex. "You hear that? They're coming."

Really? I thought. *I don't hear a thing.* Inevitably, we'd move to another tree to set up on another tom I was sure was another mile away.

"We should get closer," I whispered.

"No, no, they'll see us."

See us? This is nuts.

But by mid-morning it looked like the long-distance stuff would pay off. "There he is," hissed Alex. "Shoot him. Shoot him before he gets away. Shoot that bird!" It was too late when I finally saw it: to shoot I had to lean right and swing left.

Boom!

"Did I hit him?"

"Nope. Geez, he was right there."

"Whaddya mean, 'He was right there:'"

I protested. "He was way out there."

Alex glared. "Man, that's 35 yards, that's a 'gimme.'" He stepped off the distance: "33, 34 ... 35!"

"Okay," I stammered, "but listen, I can't shoot with you jabberin' in my ear: 'Hurry up! Hurry up!' I know what to do."

My guide's glance said, "Could've fooled me."

We broke out in laughter.

Two days later, as Alex sped toward home, Darrin Bradley, owner of IMB Outfitters, shot me a sneaky grin. "Let's go get a bird. I know where they are.

Let's see which is more important: expert calling or knowing the terrain."

We had two hours. We zoomed back to the woodlot, then criss-crossed it on foot, checking fallow fields and plowed ones until we spied them: four toms smack in the middle of a pasture. We moved fast to set up on a levy to intercept them, running, then tight-roping over waist-deep water atop a spindly log. With no time for a decoy, we low-crawled over the top and waited. I lay facing downhill, peering through grass at the black forms approaching. I wanted the big one, but I had to wait until the first two cleared.

"Shoot," hissed Darrin.

Geez, here we go again. Forget it; just pull the trigger.

At 12:45 we high-fived, back-slapped, and wondered whether we should call Alex to rub it in. (*Show Me State birds are big, and plentiful. IMB Outfitters (imbmonsterbucks.com), 866-855-7063 leases more than 20,000 acres in Missouri, Illinois, Iowa and Kansas for turkeys (hunts start at \$850). Winchester XTended Range Hi-Density (winchester.com) is heavier than lead and patterns tight. Check out H.S. calls (hunterspec.com) even if you can't blow 'em like Alex Rutledge.*)

—J. Scott Olmsted, Editor in Chief

